

4. **Tip: to get started** use research to find method each person prefers. Label it "Redesigning Our Vital Internal Communications"; include other useful questions, but also explain the strategy & benefits in the intro. This survey can also be the jump start for making supervisors into 3-way communicators -- up, down, sideways (pr 5/30).

## THREAT TO ORGANIZATIONS IS CHANGE -- & PR IS IN PIVOTAL SPOT

Recognizing it, coping with it & incorporating it into your organization's culture & its products or services has major bottomline impact, says Seena Sharp of Sharp Information Research (Hermosa Beach, Calif).

PR's change agent role is enhanced because **change is first identified in soft information -- opinion, observations, commentary, conjecture, rumor, anecdotal evidence** (pr 6/21/93). PR's interactions with all internal & external publics offer the opportunity to gather & transmit this data.

"Changes, as they are taking place, cannot be measured by the numbers. It's too early in the process." Some ways to ferret out soft info:

1. **Find change detectors**, those people who recognize early signs of change, & allow their voices to travel upward, "even without that quantifiable evidence."
2. **Ask customers** if they have unusual uses for your product/service.
3. **Constantly search the environment for clues.** Hallmark's pres noticed a Garfield cartoon strip where the generally aloof cat was uncharacteristically frightened & lonely & was hugging his owner. Hallmark used the cartoon as a valid source of information. It provided an "indication of change that could not be measured tangibly."

## ITEM OF IMPORTANCE TO PROFESSIONALS

**CRITICAL POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT APPLICATION: USE PERFORMANCE REVIEWS TO MOTIVATE, NOT TO CRITICIZE**, writes Robert Half in his book *Finding, Hiring & Keeping the Best Employees* (John Wiley & Sons, 1993). It's an opportunity for employer & employee to see where things stand -- "to formalize what has been achieved over the course of 6 months" -- & to solidify their relationship. It should focus on a minimal number of objectives, "the most important of which is to encourage each individual to perform to a higher standard." Criticisms should be offered workers at the time poor performance occurs, not lumped into a huge downer at performance review.

## WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

**PR'S WORST NIGHTMARE.** Frances Tarlton (assoc dpa, NY Health Dep't, Albany) recovering from wounds to her neck & left hand after an AIDS-obsessed fanatic walked into her office & attempted to slash her throat. Tarlton, according to the

NYPost, is a "nationally recognized expert on the fight against AIDS." She did not know her attacker -- but had come to his attention in a radio talk show appearance as part of her job.

## NEW TECHNIQUE: A HANDS-ON GAME IS A GRAPHIC TEACHING TOOL

It can help players make sense of otherwise incomprehensible data. For example, last year US Dep't of Energy decided it needed a citizens advisory group to help make decisions on what to do with the site of the Fernald Environmental Management Project (Ohio) once it's cleaned up. Uranium was enriched there from '53-'89. After members of the volunteer Citizens Task Force became familiar with the 1,050 acre site, they needed to come up with recommendations for the following:

- What should be the future use of the site?
- Determination of cleanup levels (how clean is clean?).
- Where should radioactive & hazardous waste be disposed that is generated as a result of restoration activities?
- Cleanup priorities.

## LARGE ABSTRACT STATISTICS HARD TO UNDERSTAND

"Big problem here is volume. We're talking several million cubic yards of soil to be cleaned up. Those numbers have no meaning in the abstract," Sarah Snyder of FERMCO told pr. For this reason, John Applegate, Task Force chair & environmental law prof at U of Cincinnati, conceived the game FutureSite. It aims to give players an understanding of the volume -- & the cost associated with it. As he puts it:

*"I can handle problems best if they are graphically presented, if I can work with them. Constructing an exercise like this seems to me to be a natural way to approach the challenge of absorbing detailed information while keeping an eye on the big picture."*

## HOW THE GAME WORKS

1. **Stacks of different colored poker chips** represent the different levels of contamination.
2. **white** = concentration low enough to sustain farming or residences;  
**blue** = ok for commercial use;  
**green** = can be used for green space;  
**yellow, then red, then black** = worse & worse levels of contamination so can't be used now because it's too much of a hazard.
3. **Game board** is a gridded map of the site, each grid representing 1000 sq ft. Players have to decide what to do with the site. If they want a ballfield, they have to get rid of the chips down to the green level.
4. **Count the removed chips**, multiply by the cost to remove them (amount differs for onsite & offsite removal) -- & players may find they've spent several billion dollars.

Game has 2 rules: you can't dispose of it all offsite because there's too much of it; there isn't an unlimited budget.

#### BENEFITS OF THE GAME

Task Force members, Fernald project managers & members of the public have played the game, which takes about 1 hour to complete. Game's advantages include:

- Enables creation of future-use scenarios (17 significantly different ones so far).
- Shows participants first-hand whether their demands are reasonable.
- Brings about compromise.
- Reveals community concerns -- ie, the number of trucks or trains that would be required for large volumes of off-site waste disposal; preventing ecological destruction in the cleanup process; ensuring compatible land use with the adjacent property; minimizing access restrictions to the property.

#### HOW IT TIES TO TASK FORCE GOALS

"The goal is to enhance stakeholder involvement & improve decisionmaking in the restoration process. The two go hand in hand: Better decisions will mean greater public acceptance of those decisions. Public acceptance is especially important for decisions about future use of the site." FutureSite gets stakeholders involved & shapes their perceptions thru confrontation with the facts via a nonthreatening (even fun) game. (See also prr 3/14/94, 8/20/90, 4/4/88)

#### DOWNSIZING AFTERMATH: TEMPORARIES, OVERTIME, OUTSOURCING

Latest Wyatt survey suggests slash-&-burn management may be going out of favor (prr 8/15). But strategies taking over create just as many internal relations & general pr challenges.

- **Layoffs are declining.** 26% in '94 compared to 30% reported in '93.
- 12% are **increasing employees' hours in lieu of hiring more staff** in '94.
- 28% are using **temporary employees** instead of hiring permanent workers.
- But 16% are replacing a major function with vendor-contracted services ("**outsourcing**") this year, up from 12% last year.

#### ISSUES FOR PR

What is "the **impact of contract workers** on employees & employee communication?" asks Carol Reuss (U of North Carolina) in a letter to prr. "Many are elbow to elbow with company workers, sharing work & pressures & conversations, etc. But because they are not full-fledged company employees they are not in on company-sponsored events, which is disturbing to sensitive co-workers."

**Temporary workers.** What stresses do they bring to the internal environment? "The person doing the hiring is the most critical element in the satisfaction equation," Marc Silbert of Robert Half Internat'l (which provides temps) told prr. Practitioners must start their counseling there.

"If temps come in to help people who are overworked, filling in during seasonal peaks or for absentees, full-time workers are receptive. But it requires sensitivity on the part of top mgmt saying 'we are going to help you out with some of the more mundane things that are burdening you right now.' Then the employee is thrilled. On the other hand, if temps are used to relieve people unnecessarily from work they would like to do, then you'll engender dissatisfaction."

#### PERMANENT JOBS ARE DISAPPEARING

Mgmt consultant Robert Barner in The Futurist sees instead a more adaptable structure consisting of 3 groups:

- 1) Small, relatively permanent band of core employees with broad skills who can tackle a variety of jobs;
- 2) Larger group of just-in-time, supplemental employees who can be added or eliminated as needed;
- 3) Outsourcing which permits farming out whole product & service functions, avoiding long-term personnel costs.

[What effect will this have on employee relations? Community relations? Are the larger group of J-I-T workers willingly displaced? Or resentful?]

#### MULTI-CHANNEL ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION NOW POSSIBLE

Advancing technology offers the ability to give each person, or each dep't, information **in the way they choose to get it**. It also links them in a multi-channel exchange. Organizations redesigning employee communications systems report that no one method is any longer acceptable. Elements:

- A. **Automatic e-mail**, for those who will really pick up messages there;
- B. **Automatic voice mail**, preferred by sales personnel & others who are away from their desks a lot or whose medium is the telephone;
- C. **Multi-fax machines** permit sending info to many people automatically (prr 12/20/93) with a perceived urgency factor;
- D. **Print** still is preferred by those who are leisurely readers, or want to set it aside for "when I can get to it" -- an obvious danger;
- E. **Audio cassettes** reach workers in vehicles, or commuters.

On very few lists -- except for red alerts or reminders -- is tv.

#### SYSTEM WORKS BUT DEMANDS MANY CHANGES IN COMMUNICATION STYLE

1. **Lengthy newsletter-style info won't fit.** Need is for brief data points, with referral to the relevant person -- encouraging face-to-face.
2. **Supervisors as main communicators, plus town halls & other sr mgmt media** become the heart of the system. Info transferred by the methods listed here are either (a) "publication of record" reinforcement, (b) breaking news or (c) a quick-read weekly or biweekly bulletin board.
3. **Tight information mapping** (see last week's issue) is required to avoid rewriting for each medium. This permits one draft to fit all media.